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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 000176

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: ASD VERSHBOW AND GOE DISCUSS REGIONAL
SECURITY AND BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: CDA John Yates for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

11. (C) During separate January 25 meetings, visiting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Ambassador Alexander Vershbow discussed regional issues and bilateral relations with Minister of Foreign Affairs Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Defense Siraj Fegessa, and Chief of Defense General Samora Yenus. Seyoum warned ASD Vershbow that if Somalia Transitional Federal Government (TFG) President Sheikh Sharif collapses "there is no other option." The U.S. and other interested parties, he said, must urge Sharif to step up his efforts to reach out to Somali moderates willing to join his government, specifically al-Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ), which he said was the most effective force opposing al-Shabaab, and to engage more with Puntland President Farole. Seyoum and Siraj noted the need for greater financial assistance to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to support TFG capacity-building and enable payment of security forces. Seyoum and Samora requested U.S. support for transferring the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) to UN authority. Seyoum warned that the increased movement of extremists from the Arabian peninsula to the Horn of Africa was having a destabilizing effect, and that Sudanese government was irresponsibly continuing to pursue a "divide and conquer" policy toward the south while refusing to acknowledge the likelihood of secession. End summary.

12. (SBU) Visiting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Alexander Vershbow met with Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin on January 25 for 60 minutes, and met jointly with Minister of Defense Siraj Fegessa and Chief of Defense Samora Yenus. Seyoum was joined by MFA Americas Director Tebeje Berhe Shook and Assistant Spokesman Wahide Belay. Siraj and Samora were joined by Foreign Liaison Officer Brigadier General Hassan. The U.S. was represented by Charge John Yates, OSD African Affairs Principal Director Catherine Wiesner, AFRICOM Deputy Director for Plans Rear Admiral (Ret.) James Hart, U.S. Defense Attache Col. Bradley Anderson, Col. Saul Bracero of OSD/AFR, Special Assistant to the ASD Dr. Anika Binnendijk, and PolOff Skye Justice (notetaker).

TFG Must Hasten Outreach to Moderate Allies

13. (C) Foreign Minister Seyoum told ASD Vershbow the crisis

in neighboring Somalia is increasingly international in nature, with extremist groups - including al-Shabaab - now controlled by foreign fighters. Asked what immediate actions the international community should take to promote stability in Somalia, Seyoum responded that on the political front, the TFG must be urged to reach out to moderates willing to join its ranks and bring them into government. Seyoum and Siraj identified specifically ASWJ as the most effective opponent to al-Shabaab. According to Seyoum, Puntland President Abdirahman Mohamud Farole, who recently visited Addis Ababa, is ready to work more closely with the TFG but "has concerns that must be addressed," and President Sheikh Sharif has not reached out to him. Seyoum added that while Sharif has brought many moderates into his government, others would respond if he reached out and he must be urged to act more quickly. Samora emphasized that the TFG has significant problems to overcome. He stated that service delivery was a "big problem" for the TFG because they have not established government institutions below the ministerial level. Samora also noted that Puntland was becoming more stable and emphasized the need for capacity building.

14. (C) On the security front, Seyoum and Samora said international partners must bolster efforts to build the TFG's capacity. Noting that the TFG is training troops, as are Ethiopia and Djibouti, Seyoum stressed that while Sharif is "preparing action on the ground," resource constraints are a major hurdle. Of the USD 80 million pledged at the April 2009 conference in Brussels, Sharif told Ethiopian leaders he has only received USD 3 million, which is insufficient to pay government and military salaries. Seyoum added that given

ADDIS ABAB 00000176 002 OF 003

increasing links between al-Shabaab and al Qaeda, the international community must support the security capabilities of all legitimate authorities in Somalia. He noted some modest improvement in TFG governance, including the preparation of a 2010 budget, but exclaimed that the TFG's "shopping list" every week was "unbelievable." ASD Vershbow said the U.S. agreed on the importance of building capacity in Somaliland and Puntland, while continuing to support Somalia as one state. Seyoum concurred but cautioned that bad Somaliland elections could open the door to extremists. Samora believed it was imperative to support ASWJ because it is well organized. He further stated that if the international community expected the TFG to succeed, donors would have to help build capacity in Mogadishu and then support TFG expansion.

Requests U.S. Support for UN Peacekeeping Mission

15. (C) Seyoum and Samora stressed that Ethiopia believes AMISOM is necessary to maintain security in Somalia, and that more African countries would be willing to contribute troops if it was converted to a UN mission. Samora said most African countries will not be willing to send troops to Somalia until the mission is transitioned because "the UN pays better." Seyoum requested USG assistance in raising this issue at the UN Security Council, and said it would be a topic of discussion among IGAD countries on the sidelines of the upcoming African Union Summit.

Greater Movement of Extremists from Arabia to Horn

16. (C) Discussing Yemen, Seyoum raised the GoE's concern that greater numbers of extremists are moving between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. In particular, movement of extremists into Somaliland and a resulting destabilization there would have a huge impact on the Horn. Seyoum said the GoE is actively engaging the Somaliland government to counter this threat, and noted that the U.S. military presence in Djibouti was a stabilizing factor the GoE greatly appreciates.

¶7. (C) Seyoum noted that foreign actors are fueling the crisis in Yemen, particularly Iran and Hezbollah. He added that Shiites from moderate Gulf countries, and even Europe, are also funding extremists in Yemen. ASD Vershbow responded that the U.S. and UK, working with the major Gulf Cooperation Council countries, are trying to assist Yemen by shutting down these avenues of support and help it conduct the political and economic reforms needed to overcome the crisis. This was the purpose of the January 27 London meeting on Yemen.

Khartoum's "Divide and Conquer" Strategy

¶8. (C) On Sudan, Seyoum said the Khartoum government continues to pursue a "divide and conquer" strategy, and is engaging in back-room discussions and bribery in an attempt to split the SPLM. Khartoum believes an "old guard" that is committed to Sudanese unity, as well as certain strong leaders (notably the SPLM Foreign Minister and Secretary General) can be broken off from the committed secessionists, thereby preventing southern independence. The GoE, Seyoum said, continues to urge both north and south to begin planning for a potential breakup, and specifically for the movement of people that would occur after a split. In response to a question from ASD Vershbow on whether Sudan's agreement with Chad would hold up, Seyoum said it was difficult to say because of the actions of "invisible actors." However, he said Khartoum had assured the GoE it wouldn't provoke Chad, and would ignore provocation from N'Djamena to the maximum extent possible. Seyoum predicted there would be a demand for peacekeepers in southern Sudan, but stressed that for the time being, the international community must speak with one voice to insist the CPA is fulfilled and especially to make unity attractive for the south.

ADDIS ABAB 00000176 003 OF 003

¶9. (C) Samora stated emphatically that Ethiopia could live with "whatever Sudan decides - we just do not want them to go to war." Samora seemed to be looking at the upcoming Sudanese referendum through the Ethiopian/Eritrean lens with the understanding that war could have a destabilizing effect in Ethiopia. Samora admitted that Ethiopia was not in a position to influence Sudan but that they had good relations with both the north and the south. He also admitted having great access and relations with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Samora made a point to discuss how the SPLA needed to be reorganized. He stated that the SPLA was top heavy, carrying nearly 550 general officers and providing more than 200 security guards for each minister.

¶10. (U) This message has been cleared by ASD Vershbow.

YATES